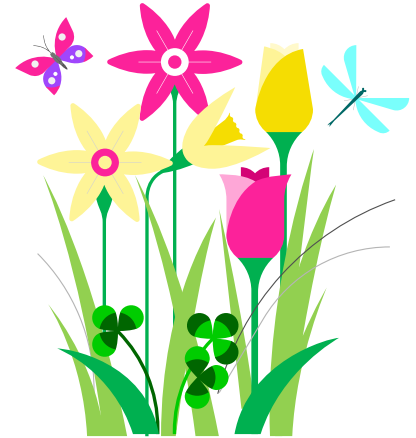# Nature and Wellbeing

Did you know that spending time in nature can be good for your health and wellbeing?

One of the reasons it's so important to protect the natural world is that we need it to be happy and healthy.

For example, scientists have found that when we spend 2 hours a week in nature, we report better health and wellbeing.

Spending time outdoors can:

- reduce stress
- restore your energy
- improve your immune system
- increase your self-esteem
- make you happier
- help your brain to develop
- improve your working memory
- make it easier to pay attention in school
- make you feel calm and relaxed
- give you a sense of purpose in life
- help you be kinder and more generous to others
- increase the chance of making choices that will help the environment.
- Create a sense of awe and wonder

Pretty amazing right?!
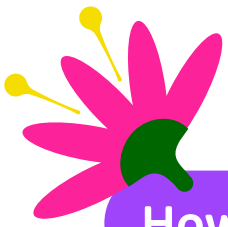
How does nature help?

Scientists don't know exactly why this is, but there are a few theories:

1. In cities, there is always lots going on, so our brains have to tune out distractions to focus on what we are doing. This is hard work, and tiring for our brains. In nature, we don't have to put in much effort at all to take in what is going on around us. This is relaxing, and gives the brain a chance to restore its energy and reserves of attention.

2. Spending time in nature seems to trigger changes in the body that are the opposite of what happens when we are stressed. Long-term stress causes all sorts of problems, so by reducing stress, nature can have a wide range of benefits.
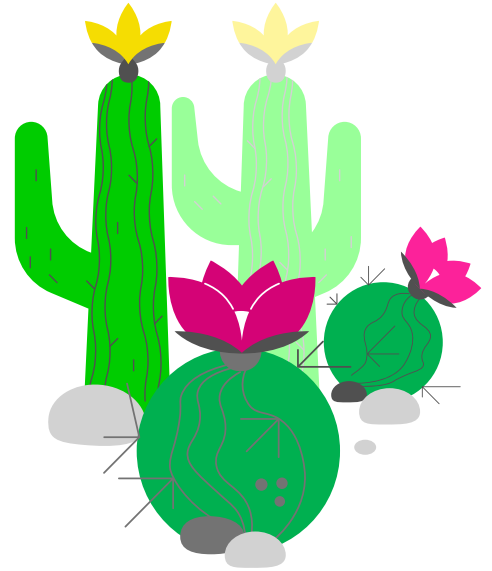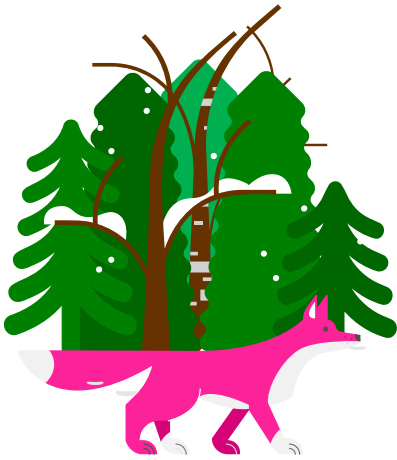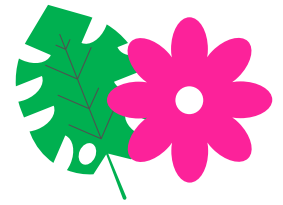
Quick Fact

In Japan, a practice known as 'forest bathing' or 'Shinrin-yoku' encourages people to ditch the tech and connect with green spaces

Do I have to go outside?

Amazingly, even watching videos of nature can have some of the same benefits- although it's better if you can get out there and experience it with all your senses! In fact, some researchers have found that the smell of nature is an important part of its benefits: certain compounds from trees can help your immune system fight off infection! The sounds are helpful too- another study discovered that people do better on difficult tests when listening to nature sounds than noises like traffic or a busy café.

So when you are outside, try to experience it with all your senses. Look at the beautiful views and listen to the sounds of the birds. Take a deep breath and smell the scents of flowers and grass in the air. Feel the texture of leaves and bark as you gently run your fingers over them. Best not to taste anything though, as some plants can be poisonous!

Experiment example

Scientists in Australia asked students to do a boring task on a computer. Half way through they took a 40 second break to look out of the window. In the second half of the task, the students whose view involved a green roof covered in flowers, made fewer mistakes than the students who just looked at a concrete rooftop.

Luckily, it seems pretty much any natural area has benefits- whether it's a local park, a forest or the seaside. But it does seem that the more wild the area is, and the more different types of plants and animals it contains, the better it is for our health.

Help the environment, help yourself

This is just one reason it is so important to do whatever we can to fight climate change and protect our local environment. Spending time in nature might help with this too. Lisa Nisbet, a psychologist at Trent University in Ontario, Canada, who studies connectedness to nature, said in an article that helping people feel connected to nature makes them more committed to looking after the environment:

"When people are disconnected from nature, they aren't motivated to work on wicked problems like climate change. We're losing the environments that contribute to our flourishing"
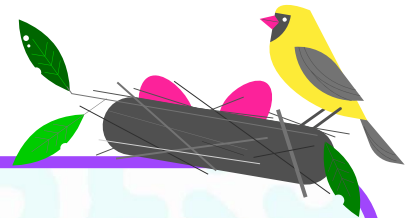
Plan your experiment:

Now you've learned a bit about how much nature benefits our health and wellbeing, why not come up with an experiment your class can carry out, to see whether you can use nature to boost your wellbeing. You can use the Great Science Skills Starters to help design and carry out the experiment, and we would love to hear how you get on!

Share your results!

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